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SUBJECT: BKGB Claims USG Terrorism on Election Day

¶1. At 1100 local on March 16, chairman of the BKGB Stepan Sukhorenko held a press conference to claim the BKGB had uncovered a plot by the Belarusian opposition, funded and organized by Georgia and the United States, to bomb four schools on Election Day (March 19) as part of a coup against Lukashenko. Sukhorenko showed video of an interview with a man claiming he was involved in the plot. This man claimed he received training at a camp in Georgia run by the Kmara youth group, and that he was trained by, "four Arabs and officers of the former Soviet army." He claimed he and other activists were instructed in hand-to-hand combat, chemical defense, explosives and the placement of tripwires.

¶2. In the video, according to news sources, the man claimed that a colonel from Georgian security services and American instructors had conducted examinations, and that the Americans ordered the trainees to bomb four polling stations in schools during voting on March 19. The man stated, "The Americans told us to organize four explosions at schools. The places and times of the terror attacks were to be given later. Concrete locations were not indicated." Sukhorenko showed further footage of several Georgian nationals "confessing" that they were to deliver money and material for disturbances on Election Day.

¶3. The BelaPAN news service reports that Sukhorenko named Anatoly Lebedko, head of the opposition United Civic Party, as one of several dozen suspects in the case. [Note: Lebedko was detained on March 15 by police, who searched his car and garage before releasing him (septel).] Sukhorenko also named Georgy Torgomadze, head of the security committee of the Georgian parliament, as being involved, and said that Georgia maintained contacts with the opposition, including Lebedko and former MP Valery Frolov, through its embassies in Kiev and Vilnius. Sukhorenko also claimed that two Georgians identified as the "Sutidze brothers" brought money to Belarus to form an anti-government militia on February 21. Sukhorenko claimed members of the NGOs Zubr and Partnership had confessed to being involved in this plot.

¶4. Sukhorenko announced at the press conference, "We know, perhaps, only a part of what is planned." He added that the BKGB would treat any attempts by Belarusians to take to the streets to demonstrate to be terrorism; "The KGB will bring criminal charges under Article 290 of the Criminal Code--the threat to conduct terrorist acts. All who go to the street and attempt to destabilize the situation will be considered terrorists."

¶5. Comment: While clearly ridiculous, these charges show the paranoid measures the regime is undertaking to scare the population away from demonstrating support for the opposition. The claims also provide further pretext for the authorities to lock up opposition activists. The opposition is calling for its supporters

to gather in October Square at 2000 on March 19. Sukhorenko's statements suggest the GOB seems prepared to meet these peaceful demonstrators with force.

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